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Personalia

In memoriam Michael A. Knibb (1938–2023)

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Personalia

In memoriam Michael A. Knibb (1938–2023)

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The sad news of the death of Professor Dr Michael Anthony Knibb (b. 14 December, Leicester, d. 6 December 2023, London) has spread through the scholarly community with deep sorrow.¹ Knibb was a remarkable biblical scholar and academic, specialising in the Dead Sea Scrolls, Second Temple Judaism, and Ethiopic Bible and Apocrypha studies. In particular, he contributed to the study of the Enochic traditions and to the text-critical study of the Ethiopic Old Testament. His critical edition of the book of Ezekiel, published in 2015, is the latest to provide a full-length critical edition of an Old Testament book.

Knibb was educated at Wyggeston Grammar School and studied theology at King's College London, University of London, Union Theological Seminary in New York, and Oxford. He was awarded a PhD in Semitic Studies from the University of London in 1974. He began teaching as a Lecturer in Old Testament Studies at King's College in 1964, where he remained for the rest of his academic career. Promoted to Reader in 1982, he became Professor of Old Testament Studies in 1986, Samuel Davidson Professor of Old Testament Studies in 1997, and Samuel Davidson Professor Emeritus in 2001.² He served as Head of Department, Head of the School of Humanities and a Fellow of the College. He had close links with the British Academy, having been elected a Fellow of the Africa, Asia, and Middle East Section in 1989. He also held a British Academy Research Readership from 1986 to 1988, and delivered the Schweich Lectures in 1995, which were

¹ <https://zwingliusredivivus.wordpress.com/2023/12/08/sad-news-the-passing-of-michael-knibb/>; <https://twitter.com/LorenStuckenbru/status/1733235800383328432?t=K4NGbXFt1dIC3cEv5qGq6w&s=08>; <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/news/professor-michael-a-knibb>; <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/fellows/michael-knibb-FBA/>; see also the obituary in *The Guardian*: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2024/mar/04/michael-knibb-obituary>; and the Wikipedia entry: https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Michael_A._Knibb&oldid=1196478898.

² On this prestigious Chair, see P. M. Joyce, 'King's College London, Samuel Davidson, and the Scope of Biblical Studies', *The Journal of Theological Studies*, 65/2 (2014), 407–424.

published as his monograph in 1999. In 2019, he was also awarded the British Academy's Edward Ullendorff Medal 'for scholarly distinction and achievement in the field of Semitic languages and Ethiopian studies'.

He began his academic career following in the footsteps of Edward Ullendorff with the joint publication in 1978 of a scholarly edition of the Book of Enoch.³ Over time, he developed his own ideas on the textual history of the Ethiopic Bible, often at odds with Ullendorff's, which he summarised in his 1995 book, *Translating the Bible: The Ethiopic Version of the Old Testament*. This book is in some ways a palinode of Ullendorff's 1968 *Ethiopia and the Bible* (which appeared in the same series of 'The Schweich Lectures of the British Academy') since it substantially revises Ullendorff's hypothesis of multiple *Vorlagen* of the Ethiopic Bible. Knibb finally put his own ideas into practice in 2015 with a reconstructive, properly termed 'critical', edition of the Ethiopic version of the Book of Ezekiel, based on the stemmatic method (*The Ethiopic Text of the Book of Ezekiel: A Critical Edition*).

He was closely associated with Ethiopian and Eritrean studies in Hamburg for decades, having been a contributor to the *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica* since its inception—writing major articles on the thorny issue of the models of the Ethiopic Bible—and also to the Hiob Ludolf Centre for Ethiopian and Eritrean Studies. He was a frequent reviewer and referee for the journal *Aethiopica*, and the last 'Supplement to Aethiopica', *Studies on the Ethiopic Old Testament: Prolegomena to a Critical Edition of the Jeremiah Cycle* (2022), edited by Martin Heide and Stefan Weninger, included two of his contributions. Knibb's bibliography up to 2007 is listed in his 2009 volume of collected papers.⁴ However, Knibb continued to work and publish until the last years of his life.⁵

³ M. A. Knibb and E. Ullendorff, *The Ethiopic Book of Enoch: A New Edition in the Light of the Aramaic Dead Sea Fragments*, I: *Text and apparatus*, II: *Introduction, translation and commentary* (Oxford–New York, NY: Clarendon Press–Oxford University Press, 1978).

⁴ M. A. Knibb, *Essays on the Book of Enoch and other early Jewish Texts and Traditions*, *Studia in Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigrapha*, 22 (Leiden–Boston, MA: Brill, 2009), 407–411.

⁵ Without any attempt at exhaustivity, see at least: 'Review of Rainer Voigt, ed., *Die äthiopischen Studien im 20. Jahrhundert / Ethiopian Studies in the 20th Century. Akten der internationalen äthiopischen Tagung Berlin 22. bis 24. Juli 2000*, *Semita et Semito Hamitica Berolinensia*, 2 (Aachen: Shaker Verlag, 2003)', *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 53/2 (2008), 383–384; 'Language, Translation, Versions, and Text of the Apocrypha', in J. W. Rogerson and J. Lieu, eds, *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Studies* (Oxford–New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), 159–183; 'The Greek *Vorlage* of the Ethiopic Text of Ezekiel', in A. Voitila and J. Jokiranta, eds, *Scripture in Transition: Essays on Septuagint, Hebrew Bible, and Dead Sea Scrolls in Honour of Raija Sollamo*, Supplements to the Journal for the

An affable man of great optimism, natural kindness, and a deep sense of humour, Michael A. Knibb was a scholar who was extremely open to exchange and who always adopted a clear method and applied it rigorously. He has left a deep mark on the field of Ethiopian biblical history and textual criticism. He will be sorely missed.

Study of Judaism, 126 (Leiden–Boston, MA: Brill, 2008), 413–421; ‘Review of Alessandro Bausi and Alessandro Gori, *Tradizioni orientali del “Martirio di Areta”*: *La prima recensione araba e la versione etiopica, Edizione critica e traduzione*, Quaderni di Semitistica, 27 (Firenze: Dipartimento di Linguistica–Università di Firenze, 2006)’, *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 54/1 (2009), 294–296; ‘In memoriam Edward Ullendorff (1920–2011)’, *Aethiopica*, 14 (2011), 221–226; ‘Review of Getatchew Haile with Melaku Terefe, Roger M. Rundell, Daniel Alemu, and Steve Delamarter, *Catalogue of the Ethiopic Manuscript Imaging Project*, I: *Codices 1–105, Magic Scrolls 1–134*, Ethiopic Manuscripts, Texts and Studies, 1 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2009); Steve Delamarter and Melaku Terefe, *Ethiopian Scribal Practice*, I: *Plates for the Catalogue of the Ethiopic Manuscript Imaging Project. Companion to EMIP Catalogue 1*, Ethiopic Manuscripts, Texts, and Studies, 2 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2009)’, *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 57/1 (2012), 185–186; ‘Review of Tedros Abraha, *I Gädl di Abunä Täwäldä-Mädehn e di Abunä Vittore. Edizione del testo etiopico e traduzione italiana*, ed., tr., Patrologia Orientalis, 51/2 (227) (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009)’, *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 57/2 (2012), 453–454; ‘Reflections on an Edition of Ethiopic Ezekiel: Agenda for the Future’, in A. Bausi, A. Gori, and G. Lusini, eds, *Linguistic, Oriental and Ethiopian Studies in Memory of Paolo Marrassini* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2014), 503–509; *The Ethiopic Text of the Book of Ezekiel: A Critical Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); ‘Review of Curt Niccum, *The Bible in Ethiopia. The Book of Acts*, Ethiopic Manuscripts, Texts, and Studies, 19 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014)’, *Aethiopica*, 18 (2015), 254–256; ‘Review of Denis Nonsitsin, *Churches and Monasteries of Tagray: A Survey of Manuscript Collections*, Supplement to Aethiopica, 1 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2013)’, *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 61/2 (2016), 548–550; ‘Textual Commentary on the Ethiopic Text of Ezekiel 1–11’, *Aethiopica*, 20 (2017), 7–49; ‘Bible, versions of, Ethiopic’, in O. Nicholson, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of Late Antiquity*, I (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 241a; ‘Review of Tedros Abraha, *Gädlä Abunä Yonas Zä-Bur. Eritrean Saint of the 15th Century. Ge’ez text edited and translated*, Patrologia Orientalis, 53/2 (236) (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015)’, *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 63/2 (2018), 550–552; ‘Review of James C. VanderKam, *Jubilees: A Commentary on the Book of Jubilees*, I: *Jubilees 1–21*; II: *Jubilees 22–50*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2018)’, *Aethiopica*, 23 (2020), 278–281; ‘Afterword’, in Meron T. Gebreananaye, L. Williams, and F. Watson, eds, *Beyond Canon: Early Christianity and the Ethiopic Textual Tradition*, Library of New Testament Studies, 643 (London–New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2021), 163–166; ‘Editions of Ethiopic Biblical Texts and their Apparatuses: Experiences and Lessons from Ezekiel’, in M. Heide and S. Weninger, eds, *Studies on the Ethiopic Old Testament: Prolegomena to a Critical Edition of the Jeremiah Cycle*, Supplement to Aethiopica, 11 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2022), 47–63; ‘Leiden Or. 14.692 (Hebr. 293) and the Ethiopic Text of Ezekiel 37:23–48:13’, *ibid.*, 65–77.